



## ARE YOU A MINDLESS EATER?

BY RUTH TIERNEY

**We make 200 diet decisions a day without even realising it – and they're making us fat. That's according to a radical new diet book that Oprah is calling 'life changing'. *Grazia* puts it to the test...**

**'IF YOU EAT TOO MUCH, IT'S BECAUSE OF YOUR** colleagues, friends, the size and colour of your food and even the room you're eating in,' says Dr Brian Wansink, whose new book, *Mindless Eating*, has become the biggest diet hit of the year.

In his very own New York 'food laboratory', Dr Wansink has conducted over 250 studies exploring what makes us eat mindlessly. 'I've found it has little to do with hunger,' he told *Grazia*. 'It's because we're getting tricked and encouraged by our environment on a daily, even hourly, basis... without even realising it.'

Nothing slipped under his research radar, from the tableware we use (large plates and deep pasta bowls increase consumption by 20 per cent), to the colour of our food (the more shades on your plate, the more you eat), to the people we eat with (if you dine with more than six people you'll eat 96 per cent more than when you're alone). And if you're snacking at home?

'Don't hide the evidence. Leave out chocolate wrappers and wine bottles – if you tidy them away, you'll eat more,' he says.

We challenged three readers to put these and Dr Wansink's other no-diet tricks to the test for two weeks. Here's what happened...

### THE WORKAHOLIC



Desk-dining is the downfall of **Katherine Bolton**, 30, from Hampshire, who co-runs a graphic design agency with her husband

**HEIGHT:** 5ft 8in

**DRESS SIZE BEFORE:** 14

**DRESS SIZE AFTER:** 12

**WEIGHT BEFORE:** 11st 10lbs

**WEIGHT AFTER:** 11st 5lbs

'I have such good intentions every morning. Breakfast is usually two slices of toast with Marmite plus a skinny latte and an apple. But once I'm at my desk, getting stressed about deadlines and surrounded by grazing colleagues, I just pick at rubbish all day long.'

'I keep oatcakes and dried figs in my drawer, but they've been there forever, untouched. Instead, I eat chocolate (especially when I'm feeling pressurised) and whenever there's a colleague's birthday I'll have some cake.'

'Most nights I work late, so I won't sit down to my evening meal until gone 9pm. By then, I'm so tired and hungry I have a huge bowl of ▶





Deep pasta bowls and large plates increase your food consumption by 20% – and if you dine in a large group, you'll eat 96% more than when you're eating alone

pasta, because it's quick and easy. And because I eat with my husband, Phil, I'll have the same man-sized portion as him. An hour later I have biscuits before bed, because I always need something sweet after a meal.'

#### DR WANSINK'S ADVICE:

'Katherine should ditch the oatcakes and figs, because they're high in sugar and carbs, both of which increase your appetite. Instead, she should have protein snacks (cheese, yogurt, etc) to reduce hunger and sugar cravings. Never look at your computer (especially emails) while you eat. I discovered that people who eat in front of a TV or PC consume 28 per cent more, because they're not concentrating on their food, which delays messages to the brain telling it that the stomach is full.

'Katherine shouldn't be eating as much as her husband – this is a classic pitfall. She should also fill half her plate with salad or vegetables and always add protein to the pasta, such as chicken or tuna. Don't buy supersize packets of pasta or sauce – the bigger the package you pour from, the more you'll eat (up to 30 per cent). Serve yourself 20 per cent less than usual, with the option of going back for more if you're still hungry. Chances are you won't go back.'

**KATHERINE'S VERDICT:** 'I've lost five pounds since following this advice. The best thing has been snacking on protein – it's curbed my appetite and improved my skin. Cutting my carb portions in half has helped, as has the "20 per cent less" rule. Losing this weight has given me a real confidence boost.'

#### THE BUSY MUM



**Fiona Davies**, a 36-year-old jewellery designer from London, grazes all day and snacks on her three children's leftovers

**HEIGHT:** 5ft 7in  
**DRESS SIZE BEFORE:** 12  
**DRESS SIZE AFTER:** 10  
**WEIGHT BEFORE:** 10st 2lbs  
**WEIGHT AFTER:** 9st 12lbs

'Working from home and looking after three children means I have constant access to the kitchen. I love Jaffa Cakes and will often eat eight in one go, kidding myself they're low fat. I snack all day to counter energy slumps, having biscuits mid-morning, then nuts, raisins and home-made fairy cakes mid-afternoon (the kids love them). I also have six or seven cups of coffee throughout the day and hardly drink any water.

'My biggest problem, though, is finishing off the children's meals. I make cheese and salad sandwiches for them and eat anything they leave. It's the same in the evening – I eat with them at 5pm and, as I'm clearing their plates, I'll snack on whatever they haven't eaten. By the time my husband Kit arrives home at 7pm, I'm hungry again and often snack on cheese, yogurts or Mini Cheddars while he's having his dinner. I've been trying to lose that elusive half a stone for years!'

#### DR WANSINK'S ADVICE:

'Store fruit and vegetables (cut into bite-sized chunks) on the middle shelf of the fridge, instead of in the crisper drawers. People who do this are slimmer and eat more fruit and veg because they're faced with it every time they

open the fridge. Similarly, always keep "bad" food on the top shelf of the fridge or cupboard. My studies show this reduces consumption of those items by 50 per cent. Only eat at the table on a clean plate – this makes it less convenient to serve, eat and clean up after an impulse snack. Only have the protein or salad from the children's leftovers. Water is important for energy and low energy levels cause snacking. Fiona is probably overeating because she's mistaking thirst for hunger, so aim for at least two litres of water a day.'

**FIONA'S VERDICT:** 'My jeans are hanging off, without me feeling deprived. When I went shopping, I could even fit into a size 10. I've been storing celery and carrots on the second shelf of the fridge and snacking on them.'

#### THE PARTY GIRL



**Hayley Sparkes**, a 26-year-old PR exec from London, eats healthily during the day, but her downfall is canapés and wine in the evenings

**HEIGHT:** 5ft 7in  
**DRESS SIZE BEFORE:** 10  
**DRESS SIZE AFTER:** 8-10  
**WEIGHT BEFORE:** 9st 5lb  
**WEIGHT AFTER:** 9st 2lbs

'I'm really healthy most of the time and try not to eat dairy, sugar or wheat. But when I'm out, I'm terrible. I go to work parties several nights a week, where I'll Hoover up countless smoked salmon blinis, spring rolls, champagne and mini-cheeseburgers.

'Whenever I take a client out for lunch, I'll usually have a creamy risotto or pasta, and if they order dessert I have one as well out of politeness. The girls in the office have a real thing for Hummingbird Bakery cupcakes at the moment, so we always have them hanging around and I'll have one or two a week. I'm also out with friends at least three week nights, when we'll usually have pizza and lots of wine. Although I'm not big, I was a size 8 this time last year and I'd like to be able to get back into my old clothes.'

#### DR WANSINK'S ADVICE:

'Sit next to the slimmest person or the slowest eater. My studies show this will make you eat less overall, as will being the first to order. You won't have time to be swayed by others' choices! Use my "rule of two" in a restaurant – ie, limit yourself to two of the following – a starter, an alcoholic drink, a dessert. Never have all three. Trick yourself into drinking less. Bartenders pour 28 per cent less into tall, skinny glasses than tumblers. Also, people pour 14 per cent less into white wine glasses than red wine glasses, because they're taller. So always choose cocktails that come in tall, skinny glasses and drink white not red wine.'

**HAYLEY'S VERDICT:** 'When I went for dinner with friends recently, I sat next to my slow-eating friend and found that I wasn't eating or drinking as quickly as usual. The only thing that didn't grab me was the rule of two – I just don't have the willpower! After two weeks I had lost 3lbs, which was pretty good considering I didn't make any big changes and didn't feel hungry once.' ■

*Dr Brian Wansink's book, Mindless Eating (Why We Eat More Than We Think), is out now (£8.99, Hay House)*